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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000649

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NEA/ARP PASS TO DOC THOFFMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/06/22
TAGS: PREL ENRG TSPL MU
SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP AND ACTION REQUEST OMAN NUCLEAR ENERGY PROGRAM

REF: MUSCAT 575

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, Charge d' Affaires, Department of State, Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) The ChargC) and Economic-Commercial Officer met with the Chief of Oman's Office of Peaceful Nuclear Technology to discuss Oman's plans with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and potential areas for cooperation with the United States. Oman is very interested in pursuing academic and expert exchanges with the U.S. government and other U.S. institutions and is highly interested in sending a delegation to the United States.

¶2. (C) The ChargC) and Economic-Commercial Officer met with Dr. Hajj Suleiman al Shareef, Chief of the Office of Peaceful Nuclear Technology in Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (reftel). Dr. Shareef requested the meeting with Embassy officials to discuss future cooperation between Oman and the United States on human resource capacity building and nuclear application and energy development. Dr. Shareef mentioned that he had just returned from a meeting in Vienna where he had discussed assistance opportunities with French and British representatives, but explained that he had not had time to meet with the U.S. Representative one-on-one. He also clarified, in response to an Embassy comment, that the MOU which Oman signed with Russia was merely a prerequisite for exploring future cooperation and training with Russian counterparts. He said the "press seemed to make more out of it," noting that many countries require MOUs beforehand for liability reasons.

¶3. (S) Dr. Shareef mentioned that an IAEA delegation visited Oman in May, and he expects four or five missions in the next three to four months, but said that his office is already overwhelmed. He explained that all of Oman's project proposals for the IAEA's Technical Cooperation Program were due at the end of the month and other than him, no one in Oman seemed to possess the knowledge or experience to develop them. In fact, other than his office, only a few medical technicians and environmental specialists in Oman had any experience with any sort of nuclear applications. He said Oman's Country Program Framework and five-year plan are also supposed to be submitted in time for the IAEA General Conference in November, but there will not be enough time to complete them. The office has already benefitted from IAEA-sponsored training on nuclear techniques in human health and is preparing for two other workshops in 2009, including one on how to deal with radioactive waste (noting that at this time the waste ultimately ends up tossed with the regular garbage) and another on medical physics. In 2010, the office is planning to host workshops on human health nuclear applications, water resources, technical laboratory and isotopes, and energy planning.

¶4. (C) Dr. Shareef also briefed Embassy on current GCC nuclear activities. He said a pre-feasibility nuclear energy study had been completed, and pointed out there are actually seven detailed studies underway in the GCC, identifying studies on nuclear regulatory/legal framework, energy pricing, nuclear safety infrastructure, fuel cells and nuclear waste management. He said the GCC is also beginning to do site studies for future energy plans, but said more information on other aspects of support are probably needed in conjunction with such a study. Should Oman ultimately decide to look towards nuclear energy to satisfy its energy needs, Dr. Shareef expects any plants constructed in Oman would not exceed 500 to 800 MW.

¶5. (C) Shareef believes Oman has a long way to go. He said Oman's Nuclear Steering Committee, headed by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will hold its first meeting soon and plans to meet every three months. Shareef said he would like to send a delegation to the United States later this year or next year to meet with U.S. agencies and representatives and potential academic and private sector partners. He would also like to immediately explore educational exchanges and training with U.S. institutions, but he hopes Omani students and fellows would be granted access to lab training without restrictions or constraints. If this isn't possible, Oman would like to know this from the beginning. Dr. Shareef also welcomed specialists, visitors, or expert exchanges with practical experience from the United States to come work in Oman on nuclear issues.

MUSCAT 00000649 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Action Request and Comment: Although Oman may be shopping around for assistance from several countries, Dr. Shareef said Oman plans to have a very limited number of partnerships. In order to maintain political balance, Oman is unlikely to seek an exclusive partnership. If Washington approves, Post requests a USG contact to help coordinate and host the Omani delegation's visit to the U.S. Additionally, Post requests follow-up on any assistance with Oman's other requests (Note: Oman has had previous discussions and contact with the Civilian Research and Development Foundation.) End Action Request.

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